

New KROQ revolution!



ANNUAL ALT.RADIO MEGA-GIG OFFERS UP AUDIOSLAVE'S OFFICIAL DEBUT. MORE PROOF OF COLDPLAY'S IMMINENT WORLDWIDE STARDOM AND STAR-PACKED WEIRDNESS FROM BECK



Rock supergroup Audioslave made their live debut to a rapturous reception

Chris Martin impressed the crowd with his Shania Twain impersonation



Los Angeles-based alternative rock radio station KROQ hosted its annual Almost Acoustic Christmas over the weekend of December 7 and 8, serving up festive performances from **Coldplay**, **Queens Of The Stone Age**, **Beck** (with **The Flaming Lips**), **The Vines**, **Sum 41**, **Billy Corgan's** new band **Zwan** and the official live debut of supergroup **Audioslave**.

P.O.D., **Disturbed**, **Good Charlotte** and **Jurassic 5** also joined the two-night line-up at the 6,500-capacity Universal Amphitheater.

Past alumni of this end-of-year bash have included **Foo Fighters**, **David Bowie**, **Deftones**, **Lemonheads**, **Linkin Park**, **Tori Amos** and **Tony Bennett**. This year, the performance by the **Chris Cornell**-fronted **Audioslave** (who also feature ex-**Rage Against the Machine** members **Tom Morello**, **Tim Commerford** and **Brad Wilk**) was the main draw, packing the sold-out arena. **System Of A**



Sum 41 danced along to QOTSA

Down's **Serj Tankian** and **Shavo Odadjian**, **No Doubt's** **Tony Kanal**, **Tom Dumont** and **Gwen Stefani**, plus **Gavin Rossdale** of **Bush** were all in attendance for Audioslave's Saturday night show. "I guess this is our first real show without (involving) taxis and clubs and where people don't know we're going to play. So thanks for coming to our first show," Chris Cornell said to the crowd, referring to the band's two impromptu performances prior to the KROQ gig – one for surprised fans outside the **David Letterman Show** in NYC, November 25, and another at LA's **Roxie Theatre**, December 6.

A banned and trim Cornell used the concert to hint at his reasons for joining the group. "These three guys saved my life last year," he said. "But in between that we made a rock record. These are some of the songs from it."

The band ploughed through six tracks from their self-titled debut including "Light My Way," "Set It Off," "Gasoline," "Like A Stone",

"These guys saved my life last year. But in between we made a rock record" **Chris Cornell, Audioslave**

future single "Cochise" and "Shadow On The Sun". Following their set, the quartet embraced each other to rapturous cheers. The overwhelmingly supportive audience response was a stark contrast to the indifference shown to the performers further down the first night bill.

Efforts to rouse the crowd by nu-metalers **Taproot** and **Trust Company** and punk quintet **New Found Glory** were all ignored by the audience. **The Used**, fronted by **Kelly Osbourne's** boyfriend

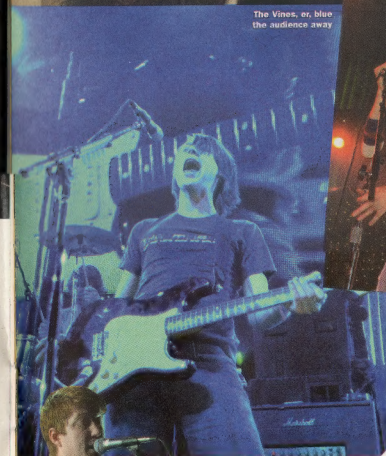
Bert McCracken encountered only mild success when they asked fans to pelt them with "anything in your pockets". It was not until **Queens Of The Stone Age** hit the stage, after a lackluster showing by Corgan's **Zwan**, that the crowd livened up. It's been a long struggle for **Josh Homme's** group, who released their debut album in 1998, but they seem to have finally caught the eye of the American alt-rock mainstream who are hooked on the single "No One Knows". At the gig, fellow performers **Sum 41** and **Zwan** filled the wings of the stage to

dance to "The Lost Art Of Keeping A Secret", and "You Think I Ain't Worth A Dollar...".

On day two, Beck appeared with a legion of special guests. Following his rendition of "White Christmas" (with his backing band **The Flaming Lips**), he invited **Chris Martin** from Coldplay, **Dashboard Confessional** and actress **Juliette Lewis** onstage for a cover of **Band Aid's** "Do They Know It's Christmas?". With the Lips' troupe of animal costumed friends (including

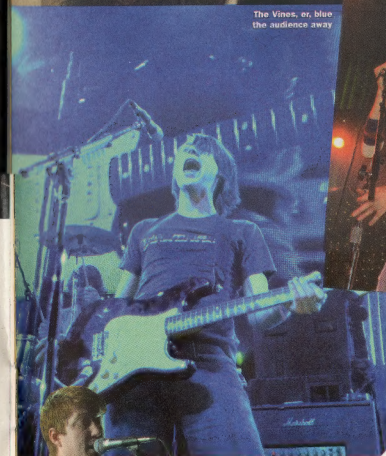
The Vines' **Craig Nicholls** as a baboon and **Ryan Griffiths** as a panda), the supergroup tossed confetti in the air and released a flood of oversized balloons. Before they donned their fake fur, the Vines stunned fans with their live intensity. "Get Free" has been championed on radio and MTV, and the KROQ Christmas shindig will help make their next visit a more lauded event after the tour of small US clubs they've just completed. The band used the opportunity to prove their worth with tracks "Outathaway!", "Autumn Shade", "Highly Evolved",

PHOTOGRAPHY: SEBASTIAN AITZ, JAMES HANDEL, PAUL



The Vines, er, blue the audience away

Beck performs with a little help from his furry friends



stormed through "Politik", "God Put A Smile Upon Your Face", "Trouble", "One I Love", "In My Place", "Clocks" and "The Scientist". During "Yellow", Martin muttered to the crowd that the track sounded like a song that **Shania Twain** should sing, and changed some of the lyrics to "that don't impress me much". He ended with a promise never to do a Shania song again.

Straight after Coldplay, fans left the amphitheatre in droves even before multi-platinum selling act **Creed** stormed off the stage two minutes into their set with sound problems. The remaining fans booed the last band on the bill

and chanted for Coldplay's return. **Creed** eventually came back out, facing even fewer patrons, then helped empty a few more seats by ejecting audience member **Adam Spriggs** of North Hollywood. The 24-year-old, who stood defiantly in an "Even Jesus hates Creed" T-shirt with his middle fingers in the air at the band, caught the attention of venue staff and eventually the band's security team, who escorted the young man out of the venue. "I paid \$70 to express my opinion," Spriggs told NME before he was walked out.

THE GUESTLIST

Tobey Maguire
Porn star
Jenna Jameson
Billy Idol
Buffie star
Alison Hannigan
Three-quarters of No Doubt



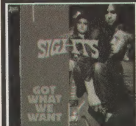
Gavin Rossdale
System Of A Down's **Serj Tankian** and **Shavo Odadjian**
Rivers Cuomo
Actor Vince Vaughn
Kelly Osbourne
Juliette Lewis

NEW RELEASES FROM CARGO DISTRIBUTION

SOLEDAD BROTHERS - LIVE SWEET NOTHING

Featuring seven tracks recorded live at the Gold Dollar in Detroit, the album is a perfect "snapshot" of the rollin', tumblin' Soledads in a live setting. Featuring tracks from both Estrus full lengths and new tunes to boot!

Out now on CD, and pretty soon on LP



THE SIGHTS - GOT WHAT WE WANT SWEET NOTHING
A high energy mix of Keith Moon drumming, Big Star/Zombies styled garage - pop, Small Faces, and 70's Stones. "The Coolest and most accomplished rock n' roll to come out of Detroit since 'White Blood Cells'" - 8/10 NME. Playing the UK in February 2003!!!

BLUEBIRD - HOT BLOOD SWEET NOTHING

Brand new full length from this LA firepiece, dealing in an infectious blend of early Soundgarden, MC5, Fugazi, 60's psychedelia, 70's skronk, Jehu's warp and Sabbath-esque pop.

Out now on CD only.

Debut UK live shows in February 2003!!!



GALLON DRUNK

A limited edition 2CD set containing many rarities and unreleased tracks. 33 tracks in all spanning the period 1992-2002, and including many tracks that have never been on CD before. Last UK show for 2002 on Wednesday 18th December at the Garage.

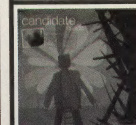
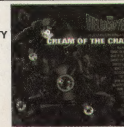
THE VON BONDIES - LACK OF COMMUNICATION SWEET NOTHING

2002 has been an amazing year for the Von Bondies, sublime garage rock cool with incredible style! This is their debut, recorded with jack white, one of the essential purchases of the year! Out now on CD and limited 180gm vinyl.



THE HELLACOPTERS - CREAM OF THE CRAP VOL. 1 THE HELLACOPTERS - HIGH VISIBILITY THE HELLACOPTERS - S/T SWEET NOTHING

Vinyl only releases from Sweden's Hellacopters, all on 180gm vinyl, all containing the finest in high energy rock and roll. Essential for fans of rock and roll!

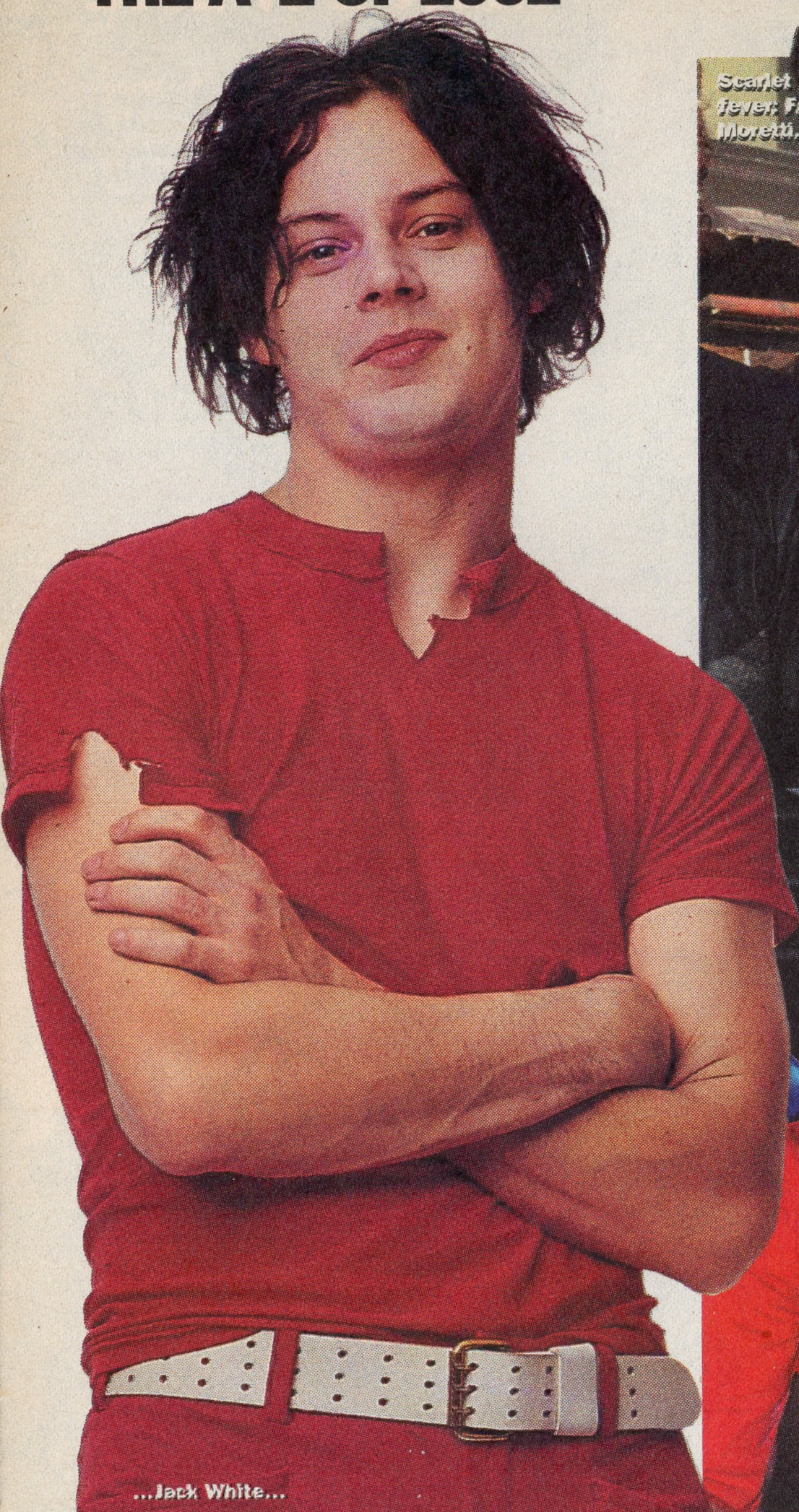


CANDIDATE - NUADA SNOWSTORM
Astonishing **** Uncut
A cracker **** The Times
Superb **** Q
Record of the Year Rolling Stone

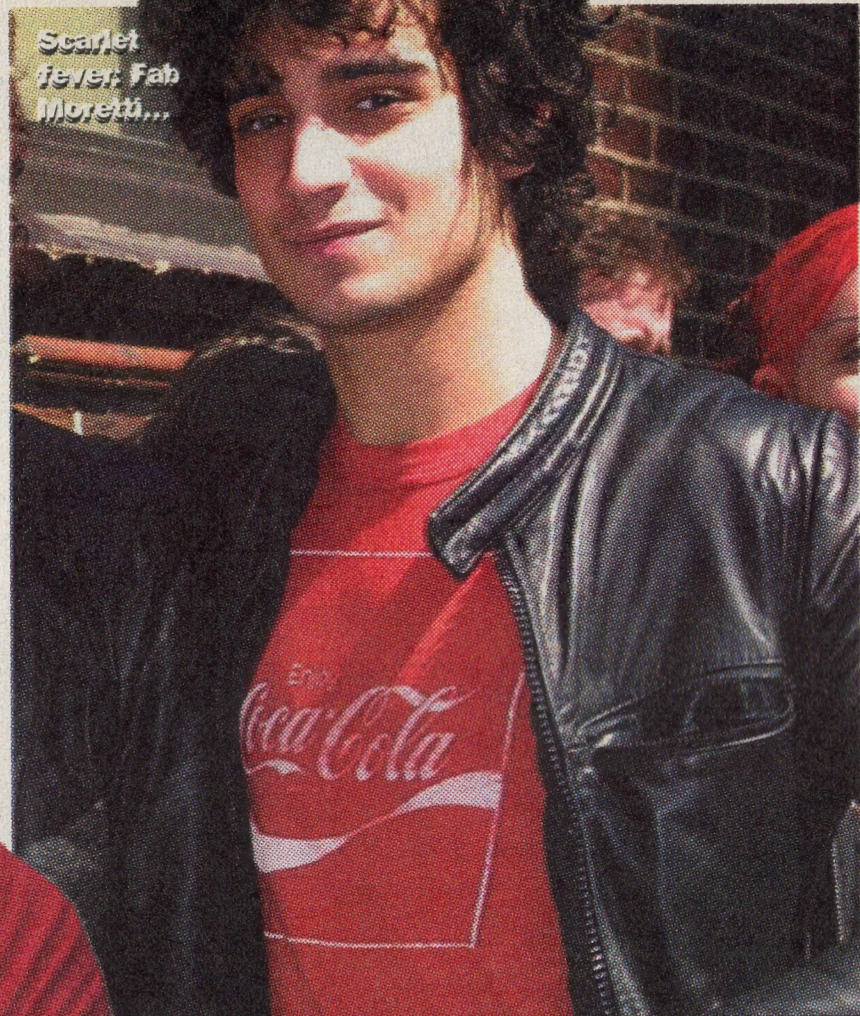
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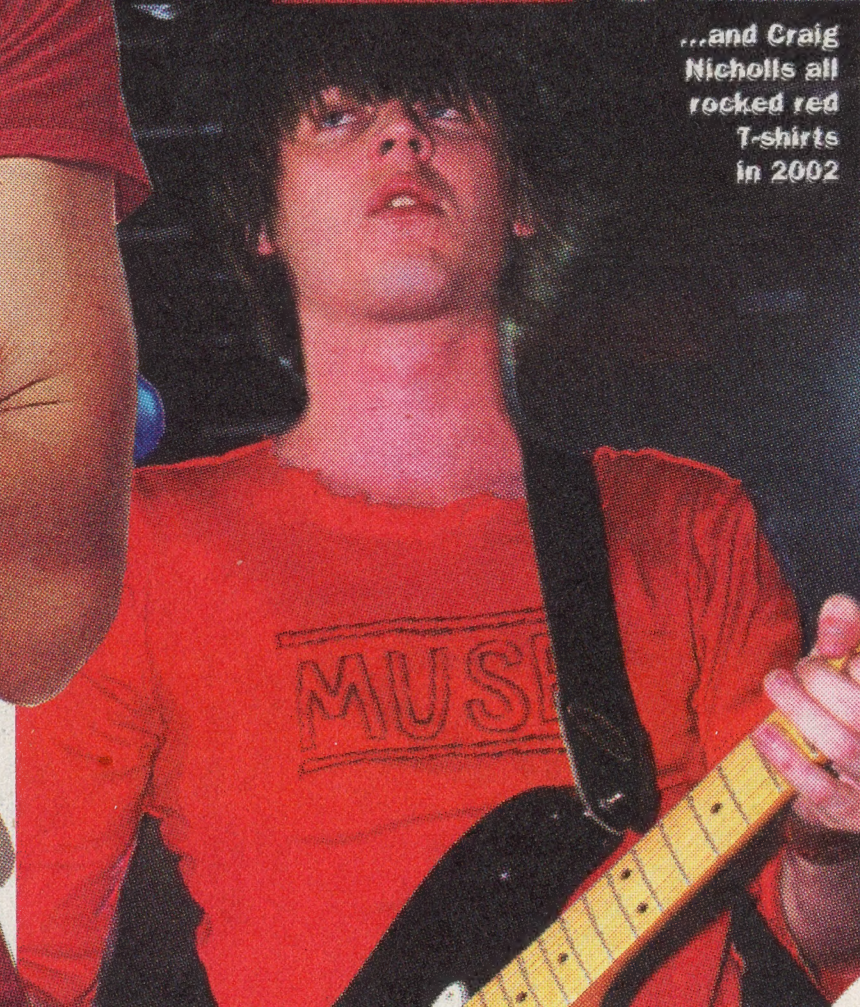
★ ★ ★
THE A-Z OF 2002



...Jack White...



Scarlet
fever: Fab
Moretti...



...and Craig
Nicholls all
rocked red
T-shirts
in 2002

Craig Nicholls, The Vines

Where will you be on December 25?

"Sydney. I'll probably be spending it with my family."

Who's the most famous person on your Christmas card list?

"I don't know what fame is."

If Jesus walked among us now, who would he be?

"Shit, man. Who would Jesus be? Gaz Coombes."

What present do you always resort to for people you're not that fussed about?

"Oh, umm, I don't know. No-one. I mean, yeah. That's it."

When did you find out about Father Christmas?

"I seriously can't remember, I could try and be funny and say last year. I believed in Santa Claus all the way up until last year."

Have you ever eaten or drunk so much at Christmas, you've been sick?

"Yeah. I would be lying if I said that hasn't happened before. I'm lucky it hasn't happened more often. The last time was probably a few years ago."

Have you kept any childhood toys?

"I doubt it."

Giving or receiving?

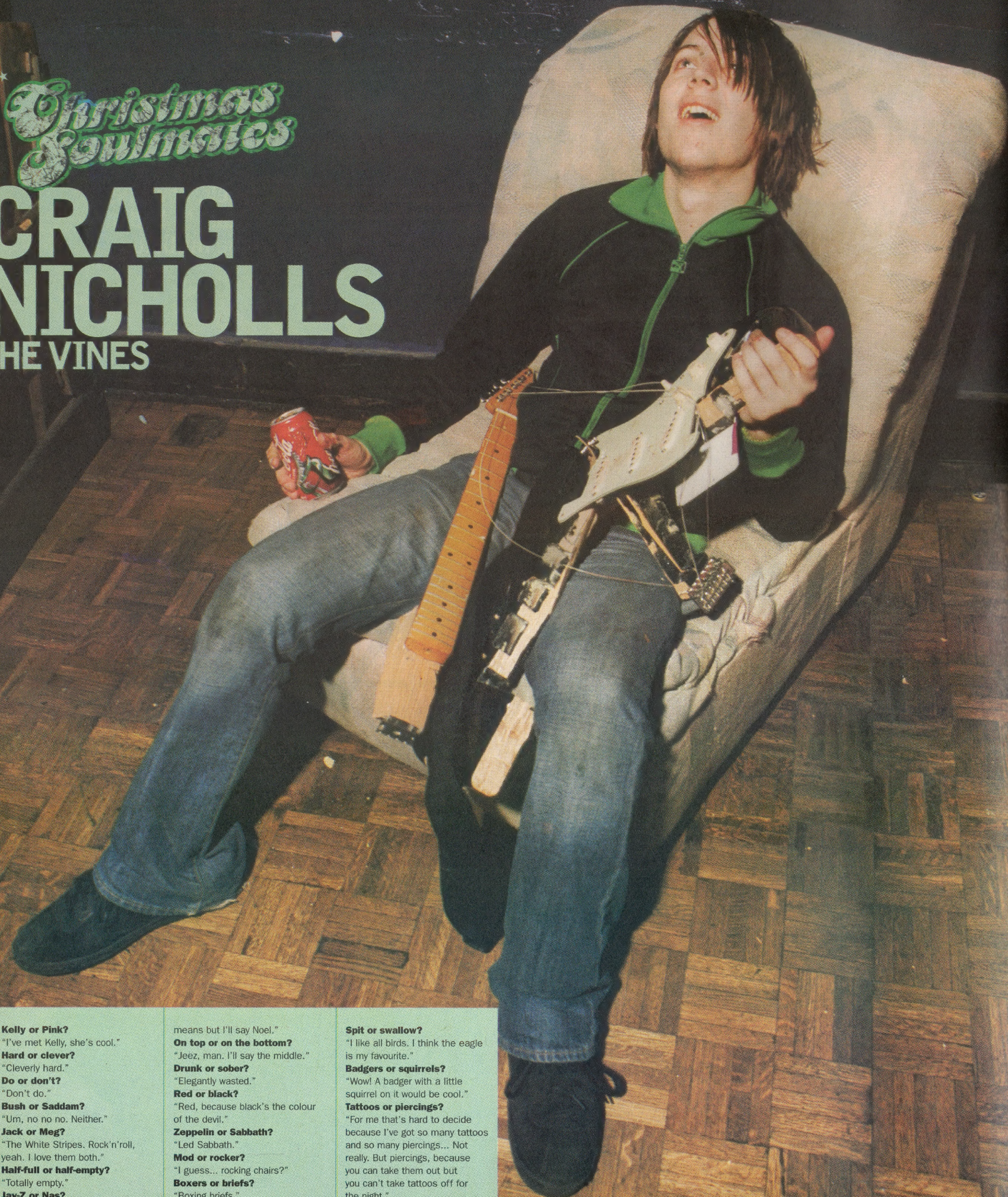
"I don't know. Both."



★ ★
*Christmas
 Soulmates*

CRAIG NICHOLLS

THE VINES



Kelly or Pink?

"I've met Kelly, she's cool."

Hard or clever?

"Cleverly hard."

Do or don't?

"Don't do."

Bush or Saddam?

"Um, no no no. Neither."

Jack or Meg?

"The White Stripes. Rock'n'roll, yeah. I love them both."

Half-full or half-empty?

"Totally empty."

Jay-Z or Nas?

"Ummmm... Nazy J-Jeff?"

Liam or Noel?

"I don't know exactly what this

means but I'll say Noel."

On top or on the bottom?

"Jeez, man. I'll say the middle."

Drunk or sober?

"Elegantly wasted."

Red or black?

"Red, because black's the colour of the devil."

Zeppelin or Sabbath?

"Led Sabbath."

Mod or rocker?

"I guess... rocking chairs?"

Boxers or briefs?

"Boxing briefs."

Beatles or Stones?

"The Beatles. They're really inspiring."

Spit or swallow?

"I like all birds. I think the eagle is my favourite."

Badgers or squirrels?

"Wow! A badger with a little squirrel on it would be cool."

Tattoos or piercings?

"For me that's hard to decide because I've got so many tattoos and so many piercings... Not really. But piercings, because you can take them out but you can't take tattoos off for the night."

Fischerspooner or The Strokes?

"I like The Strokes a lot."

IN THEIR PLACE!

Nobody said it was easy... to pick one favourite in what's been a vintage year for great records, but **Goldplay's** remarkable second tops our list of Albums Of The Year



2 THE VINES Highly Evolved

(HEAVENLY)
A near 44-minute blast around the brilliantly maddened mind of 24-year-old Aussie wunderkind Craig Nicholls. Both tortured ('Get Free', 'Outtathaway!') and tender ('Homesick', 'Mary Jane'), in a year chock-full of brilliant rock debuts 'Highly Evolved' stood apart as one of the most melodic, complex and compelling.

3 THE STREETS Original Pirate Material

(LOCKED ON/679)
On the streets, he's just a geezer. But on record, Mike Skinner is a poet of the inner-city, who sees beauty, comedy and pathos in polystyrene chip-trays. 'Original Pirate Material' swaggered through the neighbourhoods of Massive Attack, UK garage, the Specials and 'Parklife', and came out beaming like the cat that got the cream.

4 THE CORAL The Coral

(DELTASONIC)
Was it Captain Beefheart? Love? Or even The Teardrop Explodes? The brilliant debut album from these young Merseysiders started a lot of debate about who exactly it was sounded like, but this wasn't the whole story. Out of time, and brilliantly out of place, 'The Coral' set sail on an eccentric voyage driven by its own fertile imagination.

5 BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB BRMC

(VIRGIN)
Black clothes. Pale skin. Ice-burn cool. No full sentences. BRMC's music is as impeccable as their attitude and with 'Whatever Happened To My Rock'n'Roll (Punk Song)' acting as an irresistible call to the barricades, the trio's debut really was an essential missive from the margins.

6 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE Songs For The Deaf

(INTERSCOPE)
Already capable of making rock'n'roll do things that are illegal in 25 states, Josh Homme and Nick Oliveri raised the stakes with this glorious album. With Dave Grohl and Mark Lanegan saddled up alongside them, 'Songs For The Deaf' was a ferocious – yet surprisingly reflective – record that blazed with wit, mystery and intuition.

7 DOVES The Last Broadcast

(HEAVENLY)
In 2002 Doves really flew. Their second album 'The Last Broadcast' was a staggering achievement that blasted them into the space-rock stratosphere where only Spiritualized had dared to soar before. Through the slings and arrows of the new rock revolution, Doves strode purposefully on, the Iron Men of epic. Stay tuned.

8 EMINEM The Eminem Show

(INTERSCOPE)
Eminem's third album was an awesome showcase for his exemplary rhyming skills, whether over slithery synths on 'Square Dance', hard rock on 'Till I Collapse' or near-disco on the uproarious single 'Without Me'. 'White America' never had a more ferocious, and ferociously intelligent spokesman.

9 THE DATSUNS The Datsuns (V2)

From a New Zealand town previously renowned for racehorses and nice trees, The White Stripes' chums The Datsuns proved to be headbanging avatars of the new rock revolution. Their debut album compacted most of the good ideas espoused by the likes of AC/DC, Motörhead, The Stooges, Mudhoney and even Deep Purple into 40 preternaturally exciting minutes.

10 INTERPOL Turn On The Bright Lights

(MATADOR)
To a year populated by sweaty garage bands Interpol brought a welcome sophistication, and their debut album exemplified their poise. Informed by guitar bands of the early 1980s, their version of New York was one of cold nights, fleeting encounters and dry humour, all accompanied by cigarettes.

11 THE FLAMING LIPS Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots

(WARNER BROS)
Hypnotists, magicians, balloon flights and huge pink warbots: there's always been a psychedelic element to The Flaming Lips' music, but their 27th album was like dropping a bucket of microdots in the Manga comic stall of a 19th century fairground carnival. It was as wondrous as being stuck for an hour in the bit where The Wizard Of Oz turns colour.

12 THE LIBERTINES Up The Bracket

(ROUGH TRADE)
From the same English guitar pop lineage that gave us The Kinks, the Sex Pistols, The Jam and The Smiths came the fantastically frantic 'Tines'. 'Up The Bracket' perfectly ensnared their unabashedly English essence: charming, simple and often fucking hilarious.

13 THE POLYPHONIC SPREE The Beginning Stages Of... The Polyphonic Spree

(679)
Do you like the sun? No, really, do you adore the sun? Does it make you want to parp manically on a french horn in worship of it? Then you are in The Polyphonic Spree, 25 cassock-clad nutjobs who made the year's most bizarre and awesome record: ecclesiastical choir songs with the pop punch of a thousand Pulpes.

14 NERD In Search Of...

(VIRGIN)
In 2002, not only did The Neptunes dominate the worldwide charts with productions for Nelly, Clipse, Justin Timberlake and Beyoncé, but they found time to retool their side-project NERD's debut album into an armour-plated, but somehow funky, rock beast that blended sex, psychedelia and a social conscience.

15 THE MUSIC The Music

(HUT)
With their eponymous debut The Music divided opinion, but conquered the world. A colossal two-fingered salute to their doubters, everything about this LP was ambitious. And with 'Take The Long Road And Walk It' they straddled the border of rock'n'roll and dance music like no band had since The Stone Roses.

16 BECK Sea Change

(Geffen/INTERSCOPE)
Gone the silver suit and the irony. Gone the funk and the fashionable influences. In their place, this was a Beck album that wore its heart on its sleeve and declared over the course of its many slightly morose songs that that same heart was broken. Alive with sadness and regret, for Beck, 'Sea Change' was the sound of a smartarse finally becoming a human being.

17 BOARDS OF CANADA Geogaddi

(WARP)
In the four years between BOC's debut album and this follow-up, this utterly impenetrable Scottish duo had gained such a rabid following that fans would shell out close on a grand for some of their records. 'Geogaddi', 23 tracks of eerie, dislocated ambient techno, made some sense of this madness.

18 THE SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES Behind The Music

(TELEGRAM/WEA)
Kaftan-clad berserkers of the Scando rock revolution, Soundtrack transcended a long and slightly frightening musical history with the smorgasbord of powerchords, psychedelia and hairy retro-fetishism that was 'Behind The Music'. Smashing tunes, as well.

19 THE HIVES Your New Favourite Band

(POPTONES)
Who'd have guessed a bunch of dandies from Sweden would take the world by storm in 2002 with a mix of ultra-raw garage rock and near-pathological narcissism? Well, Alan McGee obviously, who compiled all the good bits from The Hives' first albums onto this gobsmacking compilation.

20 JOHNNY CASH The Man Comes Around

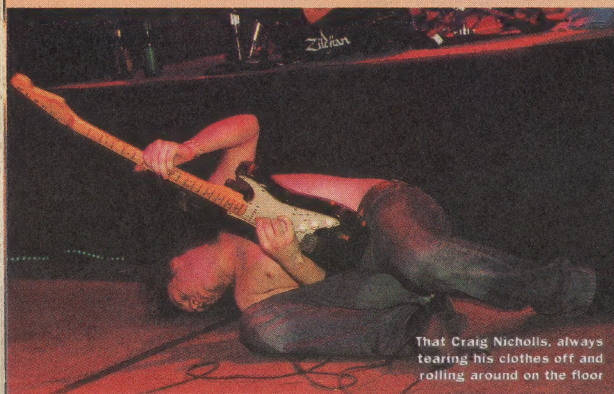
(LOST HIGHWAY)
Stark, brooding and relentless, this, the fourth of Cash's album's helmed by über-producer Rick Rubin, is the best of the lot. The version of Nine Inch Nails' 'Rust' is better than the original and the newly-penned title track is the best Cash has written in 20 years.

21 FOO FIGHTERS One By One

(RCA)
Dave Grohl returned from a tour beating skins for desert-dwelling drug fiends QOTSA, took one look at the polished turd that was the forthcoming Foo's album, and scrapped the lot. Its replacement, 'One By One', came together in three wired weeks. As you might expect, it rocks like a bastard.

22 MS DYNAMITE A Little Deeper

(POLYDOR)
'The new Lauryn Hill' mantle was a massive burden to bear, but the 21-year-old known to her mum as Niomi McLean-Daley pulled it off with her intelligent, incisive debut. Three brilliant singles and countless awards followed. Beat for beat, as good an R&B album as was produced this year – on either side of the Atlantic.

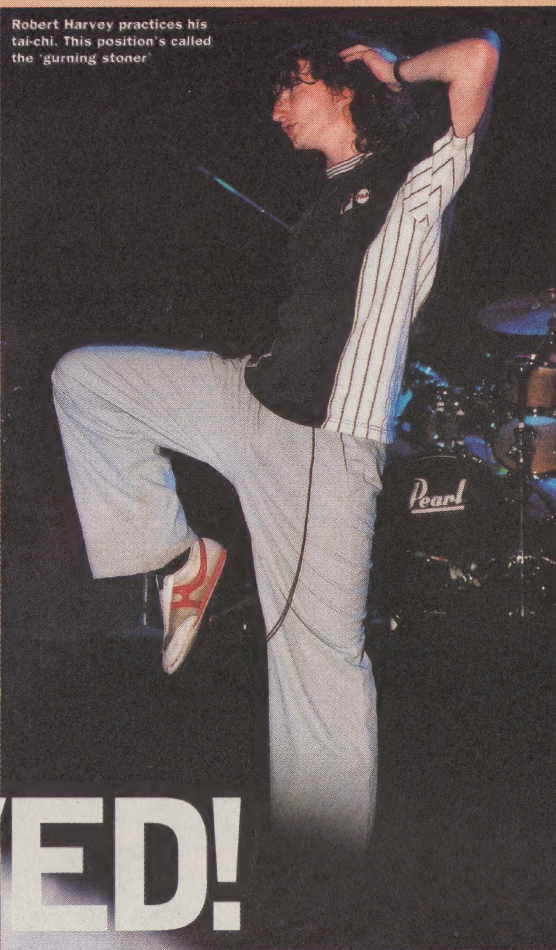


That Craig Nicholls, always tearing his clothes off and rolling around on the floor



The boys are thrilled at the prospect of a game of butt darts

Robert Harvey practices his tai-chi. This position's called the 'gurning stoner'



HIGHLY INVOLVED!

IT'S ONE BIG MUTUAL LOVE-IN AS THE AUSSIE ROCKERS AND BRIT BAGGYDELICISTS JOIN FORCES FOR A TREK ACROSS AMERICA



THE VINES/ THE MUSIC

Columbus Newport Music Hall/Cincinnati Bogart's
In the concrete catacombs beneath Bogart's, a barn-like venue in the northern suburbs of Cincinnati, a home-made rock'n'roll ornament takes pride of place on the wall. This is the Legendary Heavy Metal Wheel Of Sex, and it offers some exotic leisure options to the more adventurous band. Spin the arrow and it might suggest such poetic delights as "She sucks your ass for a backstage pass" or, more prosaically, "You notice a smelly green discharge". *NME's* personal favourite is "Anyone for a round of butt darts?"

Another time, perhaps. Because we are here in Ohio to witness a high-voltage rock'n'soul double-header by two of the world's hottest guitar bands. The Vines are already planet-shagging love gods in America, selling more than half a million copies of their debut album 'Highly Evolved', blazing across MTV and hijacking a *Rolling Stone* cover in just six eventful months.

Bluesadelic psych-rocking Yorkshire terriers The Music, meanwhile, are still an unknown quantity in the US, with their self-titled debut album not even out until February. But they have toured here solidly in recent months, and are cruising comfortably in the wake of their Australian labelmates.

"Most people are checking it out with their arms folded at first," says Music guitarist Adam Nutter, a deadpan northern soul not given to self-aggrandising bravado. "But by the end of the gig their hands are in the air, cheering. It seems to be like that wherever we go."

The warm bond between The Vines and The Music is immediately apparent. The sun-kissed Sydney-ites have formed an unlikely but deep alliance with the scroggy upstarts from Kippax.

"I get the impression they're really into us," beams The Music's Robert Harvey, a balls-out throatgoblin onstage but a soft-spoken squirrel-lover in person. "I've been getting into their gigs, we both watch each other every night." Vines singer

Craig Nicholls is equally effusive in praising his Brit-rock peers.

The Music give me so much inspiration," he says. "I have a lot of respect for them and really it's an honour to play with them."

Does being four or five years older make you feel protective towards them?

"Not really. They're probably more well behaved than I am. I may find it intimidating to tour with someone my own age. No, I'm just talking junk. Age doesn't matter. I just think they're an amazing band, really exciting."

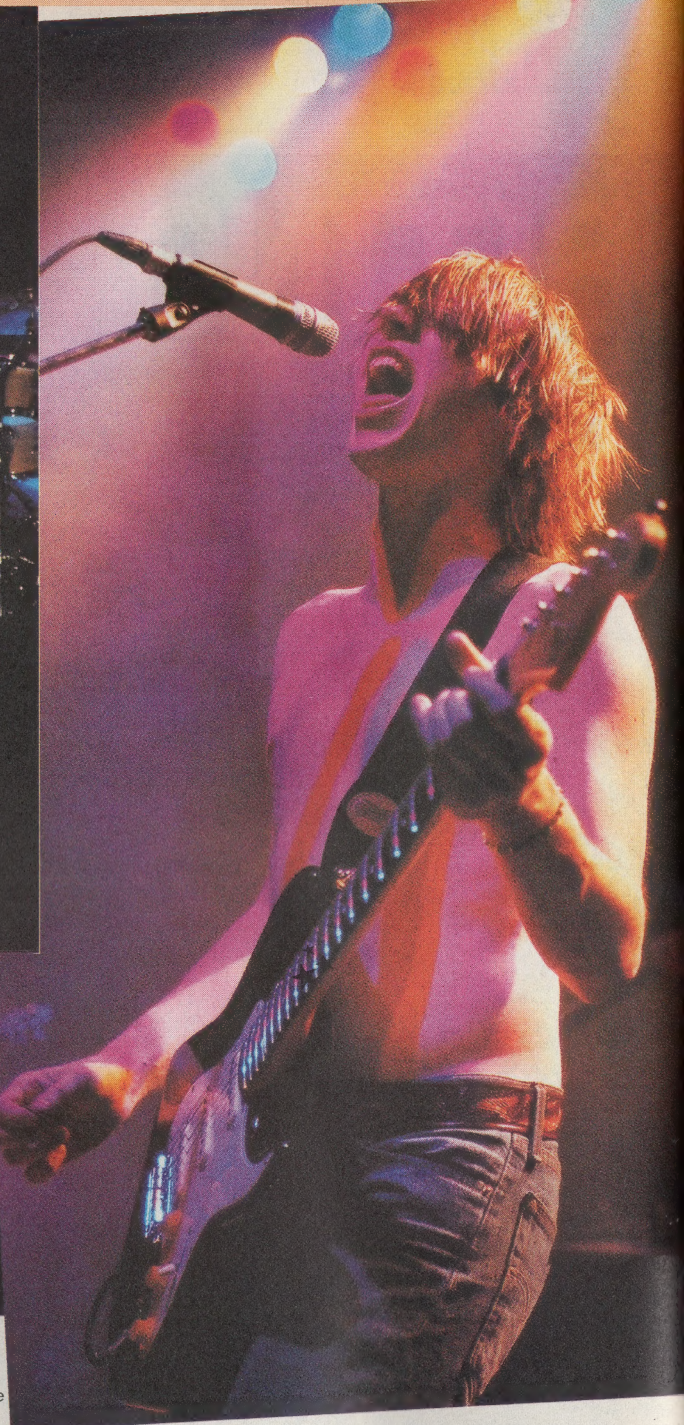
Rewind 24 hours to nearby college town Columbus, and this mutual excitement is proving more elusive. It's Thanksgiving weekend, colder than Siberia, and both bands seem stuck in second gear.

At the Newport Music Hall, an ornate theatre opposite Ohio University, The Music are squeezed into a pokey dressing room with a single tatty armchair,

a trashed-looking toilet and a rider consisting almost entirely of meat and cheese. The Vines, by contrast, have three chairs, fresh fruit and unlimited reserves of Red Bull. Such is the ruthless class system behind rock's anarchist party vibe.

Arriving onstage to the booming tones of Laurence Fishburne in *The Matrix's* ominous warning about rips in the fabric of reality, the Yorkshire quartet look like they could almost have beamed down from a parallel dimension themselves. Some alternate Leeds of the remote past or distant future, perhaps, all unruly hair and Chopper bikes, knock-off sportswear and chip-shop swagger. As English as early closing and rainy kickabouts in the park. To Columbus, it must look like aliens have just stepped off a ship from Planet Zeppelin.

The Music kick straight into battle mode with the blazing thunderblast of 'The Dance', the Rage-heavy riffmonster 'Jag Tune' and the superheated funk





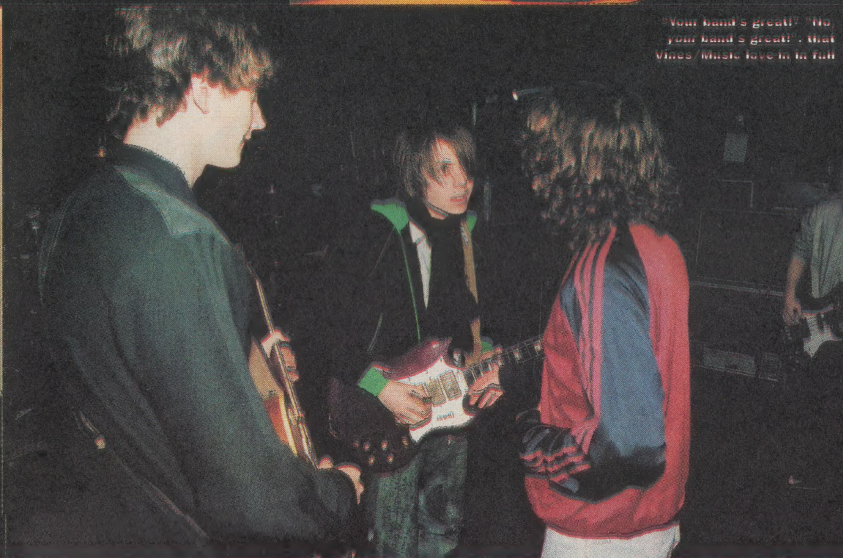
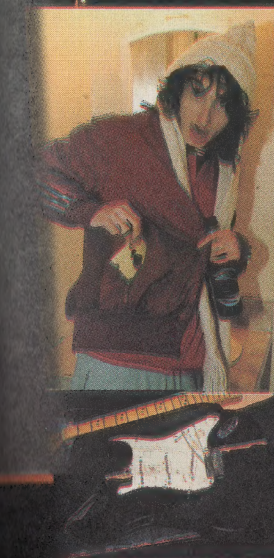
Not pictured (probably inside, in fact): herds of screaming women



Another day, another Vines drumkit smashed



Stoned immediate: The Music



Your band's great? No your band's great! That Vines/Music love-in is full



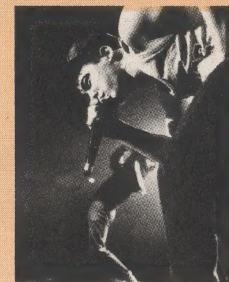
On faces that hung over here past!



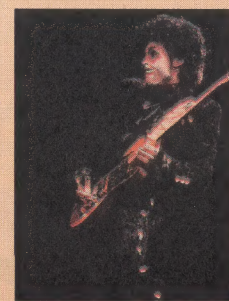
BILLS BILLS BILLS

Not all line-ups are as fortuitous as the Music/Vines mutual appreciation society

● Supporting **Jane's Addiction** at the Hollywood Bowl in 2001, **Courtney Love's** set overran and the mime artists hired by JA mainman Perry Farrell annoyed her so much that she booted one of them up the arse.

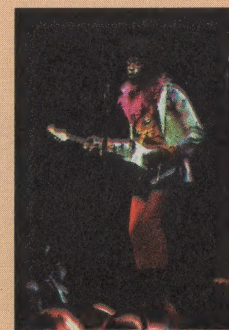


● In 1985, **Madonna's** Like A Virgin tour was set to play some of America's biggest venues. Who better to support the Material Girl than a beer-chucking pre-success **Beastie Boys**? Well, a lot of people, actually. Every night the Beasties left the stage to a chorus of boos.



● In 1983, **The Rolling Stones** invited **Prince** to support them on their arena tour: diehard Stones fans pelted Prince with beer cans and, on one occasion, a bag full of chicken bones. Nice.

● Conservative groups complained when their daughters were forced to sit through support act **Jimi Hendrix's** gyrations on **The Monkees'** 1967 US tour. Jimi lasted five shows.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DEAN CHALKLEY/RETNA

juggernaut 'The People'.

But a faint sluggishness is soon discernible beneath the fireworks, jamming the gears just as Robert stops shaking like a human lightning conductor and begins shagging an invisible Shetland pony to the seismic cock-rock shudder of 'The Truth Is No Words'. By the time he leans back and bellows 'Take The Long Road And Walk It' to the heavens, The Music seem to be coasting on two engines rather than their usual four. They rock, for sure, but their more supple, strange and soulful sides have not had a fair hearing.

Then again, The Vines have more to live up to, and more to lose, in the Columbus spotlights. Hormonal hysteria greets the Oz-rock It Boys on arrival, and they duly tear the walls down with a slam-bam 'Outtathaway!'. A few tunes later, Craig rips his top off during the woozy avalanche of 'Highly Evolved' before tearing off a raw, bleeding chunk of Kurt-lite immortality with 'Get Free'.

But despite their combustible charisma and powerpop hooks, The Vines are miles off course

when it comes to staging a smartly paced rock show. Ace newbie 'Amnesia' gets an early airing, all vapour-trail harmonies and strung-out psychedelia, while Craig's acoustic tumble through OutKast's 'Ms Jackson' remains an inspired, sublime novelty. But then comes a mid-set slump into lumbering plodddage from which the band never quite recover. 'Mary Jane' is simply flat and interminable, and the evening's

"The Music give me so much inspiration. I have a lot of respect for them and really it's an honour to play with them" Craig Nicholls

second version of 'Autumn Shade' a real drag. Even the relatively punchy new tune 'Evil Town' sinks into a bloated, bluesy rut. Played back to back, they succeed in reducing a moshing frenzy to static, shuffling bemusement.

When Craig finally rejoins the living with his guitar-smashing, drum-trashing tantrum 'Fuck The World', it feels forced and staged. Half the crowd leave wondering what all the fuss is about.

Afterwards, the backstage mood is subdued. The Music break the ice by starting a food fight with their British publicist, who responds in kind by powerballing a thick slab of cheese into Adam's face. Ouch. No dairy products are flying on The Vines' tourbus, although there are several characters who seem to have stepped straight out of a vintage episode of *Miami Vice*, and a gaggle of exotic

'models'. But Craig and Robert seem oblivious to the pungent smoke and boozy banter, quietly slipping away for a heavily scented bonding session in the freezing Ohio night.

Back in Cincinnati the next night, both bands are much more fiercely focused. The dressing rooms in the bowels of Bogart's are plusher, the cheese mountain taller, the mood

sharper. Finally, it is time for the love-in to end and the rock gladiators to enter the arena.

The Music set the cavernous venue ablaze from the start, with Robert wailing and stomping like a classic soul shouter. He headbangs with reckless fury to the piledriver tumult of 'Disco', screeches himself hoarse during 'The Truth Is No Words', then summons thunder and lightning for a flaming 'Take The Long Road

And Walk It' – dedicated, without fanfare, to The Vines.

Most memorably, they close with 'The Walls Get Smaller', an instrumental jam somewhere between Joy Division and Metallica which resoundingly shreds The Music's cartoon image as retro revivalists. OK, so some wag in the audience shouts 'Freebird', namechecking the deep-fried Lynyrd Skynyrd stoner anthem. But this is Middle

America. That's a compliment.

Next up, The Vines do much to explode their reputation among the nay-sayers as over-praised media darlings. Tonight they hit the sort of delirious peaks that only genuinely rare talents can muster. A dreamy, weeping 'Autumn Shade'. A riotous, slash'n'burn demolition of '1969'. Craig lost in eye-rolling euphoria one minute, consumed by volcanic rage the next. A real star.

After the show both tourbuses are hemmed in by armies of female admirers. "Jesus, it's like *Night Of The Living Dead* out there," observes Adam with a shudder, pulling down the blinds.

Two hours later, as the party winds down, NME finds Craig Nicholls locked away at the back of The Vines' bus, hiding from an adoring world with half of The Music, several spliffs and what looks suspiciously like an Eric Clapton video blasting from the TV. It's the most innocent love-in ever. No animal orgies, no toxic chemicals, no satanic rituals. And definitely no butt darts. Sometimes even planet-shagging rock gods deserve a night off.

Stephen Dalton